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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is often described as a "transition" period between childhood and adulthood. Parents of adolescents are faced with the challenge of encouraging their adolescent offspring to achieve autonomy, while retaining a certain degree of responsibility for their actions. This study examined how differing parental qualities such as attitudes and parenting styles relate to parental satisfaction. Subjects (N=636) were parents whose sons or daughters attended a public high school. Parent satisfaction, adolescent social competence, and parental qualities were measured using self-report scales. The results indicated that parents who reported evidence of social competence in their adolescents were also found to report high levels of parent satisfaction. Parents who reported themselves to be the most supportive of their adolescents were highly satisfied with parenting their adolescents. Particular styles of attempting to control the adolescents explained variance in parental satisfaction for fathers, but not for mothers. Fathers who used coercion with their adolescents were the least satisfied. In a similar pattern, fathers who used induction reported greater satisfaction with their adolescents. Additional studies are necessary to further refine conceptual models of the predictors of parental satisfaction with their adolescents and to consider bidirectional predictors of parental satisfaction. (ABL)

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Dimensions of Adolescent Social Competence and Parental Qualities as Predictors of Parental Satisfaction

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Paper presented at the National Council on Family Relations Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA (November, 1989).

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Dimensions of Adolescent Social Competence and Parental Qualities as Predictors of Parental Satisfaction

Adolescence is often described as a "transition" period between childhood and adulthood. The rapid changes in adolescents' physical stature, intellectual abilities, abilities to influence others, and the increased range of people with whom adolescents interact all present new issues for adolescents and their families. In general, the parents of adolescents are faced with the challenge of encouraging their adolescent offspring to achieve autonomy, while retaining a certain degree of responsibility for their adolescents' actions (Baumrind, 1975; Kandel & Lesser, 1975, Montemayor, 1986; Peterson, 1986; Peterson & Leigh, in press).

Many studies of parent-adolescent relations emphasize the struggles and conflicts between parents and adolescents. By focusing upon the stressful aspects these relations, it is easy to overlook the possibility that parents may receive satisfactions from aspects of their relationships with their adolescents.

In existing literature, parental satisfaction with adolescents has received minimal attenion (Goetting, 1986). In contrast, sources of life satisfaction for adults in the United States has received considerable research attention. Scholars have consistently found that satisfaction with family life is an important part of overall life

satisfaction (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Flanagan, 1978; Gurin, Veroff, & Feld, 1960; Lowenthal, Thurnher, Chiriboga, & Associates, 1975; Medley, 1980).

Family life satisfaction is a multidimensional concept that includes satisfaction with both marital and parental roles. Considerable research is available concerning the factors associated with both marital satisfaction, or the feelings of gratification in marital relationships (Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). In general, it appears that marital satisfaction is relatively high prior to the birth of the first child and after children leave the home. Marital satisfaction is often lowest when adolescents are in the home (Rollins & Cannon, 1974; Rollins & Feldman, 1970).

When parental roles are considered in relation to family life satisfaction, the focus has traditionally been on the extent to which children impact marital satisfaction (e.g., Glenn & McLanahan, 1982). Snyder (1979), for example, investigated the impact of children on marital satisfaction by asking the degree to which children served as a source of conflict between marital partners or the degree to children interferred with spontanity in the marital relationship. In contrast, more recent scholars have recognized the importance of parental satisfaction as a separate dimension of family life satisfaction (e.g., Hendrix, 1989).

One aspect of parenting adolescents that has the potential to provide gratification (or satisfaction) for the parents of adolescents is when parents recognize social competence in their adolescents. Adolescent social competence is defined as the characteristics of adolescents to function effectively in the family and the broader social context (Peterson & Leigh, in press). When parents recognize the increasing abilities of their adolescents to function effectively in the family and in other social contexts, parents see evidence of their own successes in parenting roles. When parents recognize social competence in their adolescents, therefore, the can derive parental satisfaction from their own successes in parental roles (Henry, 1987).

Peterson and Leigh (in press) have recently identified several dimensions of adolescent social competence such as adolescent independence, conformity, and dimensions of adolescent power. Recent scholarship indicates that socially competent adolescents demonstrate a balance between increased independence and conformity to social expectations, including parental expectations (Grotevant, Cooper, & Condon, 1983). Peterson (1986) found that adolescents also may have the potential (or power) to influence their parents in a variety of ways. This potential, known as adolescent power, is evidence of the ability to influence others in the social context. Such

power is evidence of adolescent social competence. Based upon the existing literature adolescent independence, conformity, expert power, and reward power were expected to demonstrate positive relationships with parental satisfaction. Adolescent coercive power was expected to demonstrate a negative relationship to parental satisfaction.

Limited information is available about how differing parental qualities such as attitudes and parenting styles relate to parental satisfaction. To explore this idea, was hypothesized that parental support, induction, and traditional sex role attitudes would be positively related to parental satisfaction, while parental coercion was expected to be negatively related to parental satisfaction.

Finally, although dimensions of adolescent social competence and parental qualities were expected to be of primary importance, recent scholarship also has indicated that specific sociodemographic variables (i.e., gender of adolescent, number of children in the families, parental marital status, father's occupational status (SES), and mother's employment status) merited inclusion as control variables.

Method

Subjects

This study was part of larger project focusing on parent-adolescent relationships for which data was collected from both parents and adolescents. The sample for the present study consisted of parents whose sons or daughters attended the only public senior high school in an eastern Tennessee community. Initially, the potential population was identified as the mothers and fathers of 956 high school students in the selected school. Of this total, 822 parents agreed to particpate in the larger study. A subsample of responses from 636 white parents (303 fathers and 335 mothers) was examined in this study. The parents responded to the questionnaires in their homes and returned them by mail.

Considerable variability existed in the socioeconomic levels of the sample. The mean ages for mothers and fathers in the sample were 41.4 and 44.4, respectively. The mean age of adolescents about whom parents responded to the items was 16.4. The mean number of children for parents in the sample was 2.99.

Measurement

Parental satisfaction, adolescent social competence, and parental qualities were measured using self-report scales developed specifically for the larger project. Each of the scales consisted of Likert-type items.

Measure of Parental Satisfaction

The level of parental satisfaction reported by fathers and mothers was assessed by a 6-item scale. Each parents was asked to report the level of enjoyment and overall satisfaction they experienced with a specific adolescent. Specific items included: (a) Generally speaking, being the parent of this teenager has been one of the best things in my life; (b) As a parent, I enjoy doing things with this teenager. Internal consistency reliabiity coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for the six items were .77 for fathers and .69 for mothers.

Measures of Adolescent Social Competence

Adolescent independence was assessed through a 9-item scale asking parents how much confidence they had in their adolescents' abilitiy and freedom to make responsible decisions about life issues. Sample items were as follows: (a) This teenager decides what is right and wrong quite often without my control; (b) I have confidence in this teenager's ability to make enough of his/her own decisions. Internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for the scale were .80 for fathers and .83 for mothers.

Adolescent conformity was assessed through a 9 item scale devised by Thomas, Gecas, Weigart, and Rooney (1974) asking parents' perceptions about how likely their adolescents were to conform to parental expectations on

important life issues (i.e., entertainment, language, education, friends, dating, place of residence, and career choice). Sample items were as follows: (a) If I asked him/her to stop, this teenager would not talk in ways that I do not like; (b) This teenager would not go to particular movie that I believe s/he should not see. Internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for the scale were .72 for mothers and .75 for fathers.

Dimensions of adolescent power were measured using scales developed by Peterson (1986), consistent with French and Raven's (1959) conception of expert, legitimate, reward, and coercive powers. Items in the scales were designed to measure the dimensions of adolescent power in content areas such as future occupational goals, educational matters, and relationships with the opposite gender. Examination of the initial set of 35 items by a panel of social scientists for content validity resulted in the elimination of 8 items. The expert, legitimate, reward, and coercive power dimensions of adolescent power were identified from a four-factor solution for the responses to 22 Likert-type items on the potential influence of adolescents (Peterson, 1986). Separate principal components factor analyses were conducted on the remaining 22 items for the responses of both mothers and fathers. Four items resulted in factor loadings less than .40 and were dropped from the scale.

The four factor solutions for the 18 adolescent power items for expert, legitimate, reward, and coercive powers were essentially the same for fathers and mothers. Sample items were as follows: (a) This teenager knows a great deal about future career possibilities (i.e., expert power); (b) This teenager has a right to choose his/her own dating partners (i.e., legitimate power); and (c) This teenager is the kind of person who could make me suffer by not doing what I tell him/her to do (i.e., coercive power) (see Peterson, 1986 for the complete set of items). The Cronbach's alphas for the adolescent expert, legitimate, reward, and coercive power factors were .84, .81, .91, and .91 for mothers and .86. .77, .92, and .90 for fathers, respectively.

Measures of Parental Qualities

Parental support, induction, and coercion were measured using items with the highest factor loadings on measurements used by Peterson, Rollins, and Thomas (1985). Parental support were measured by a 3-item scale that assessed parents' perceptions of their nurturant behaviors (e.g., encouragement, demonstrating affection) toward their adolescents. Internal consistency reliabiity coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for the scales were .78 for mothers and .70 for fathers.

Parental induction was measured by a 3-item scale measuring parental perceptions of their use of reasoning as

a control technique. Internal consistency reliabiity coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for the scales were .78 for fathers and .80 for mothers.

Parental coercion was measured by a 6-item scale measuring parental perceptions of their force or punitiveness as a control approach. Internal consistency reliabilty coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for the scales were .67 for mothers and .69 for fathers.

Parental sex role attitudes were assessed by a 6-item scale measuring the degree of traditional assumptions about sex roles made by parents, using a scale developed by Smith and Self (1980). Internal consistency reliabiity coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) for the scales were .57 for fathers and .66 for mothers.

Analysis

Hiearchical multiple regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses involving adolescent social competence and parental qualities as predictors of parental satisfaction. In the first set of equations, six dimensions of adolescent social competence (i.e., indepedence, conformity, expert power, legitimate power, reward power, and coercive power), four parental qualities (i.e., support, induction, coercion, and sex role attitudes) and five control variables (gender of adolescent, number of children in the family, parental marital status, father's occupational status, and mother's employment status) were

entered into each equation as predictors of parental satisfaction. Due to the dichotomous nature of three control variables, dummy variables were created for the gender of adolescent (male coded 0, female coded 1), parental marital status (married coded 0, divorced coded 1), and the mother's employment status (employed coded 0, not employed coded 1) variables and entered into the regression equation with the other predictor variables..

In the second equation, an additional set of 10 predictor variables were entered to test for possibile interactions between the primariy variables (i.e., dimensions of adolescent social competence and parental qualities) and the gender of adolescent variable. The gender of adolescent dummy variable was used to create gender of adolescent by adolescent social competence and parental qualities interaction terms as predictor variables (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). For example, inclusion of adolescent legitimate power by gender of adolescent interaction term as a predictor variable tested where relationships betwen adolescent legitimate power and parental satisfaction were different with respect to adolescent sons and daughters. None of the interaction terms reached significance ($p < .05$) in the final set of regression equations

Separate regression equations for mothers and fathers were required because there was a high intercorrelation among the predictor variables for each. These

intercorrelations indicated potential multicollinearity that could result in large standard errors and instability in estimating the parameters of variables (Kasadra & Shih, 1977). The bivariate correlation coefficients were examined to determine if high correlations ($r > .70$ or $r < -.70$) existed between the predictor variables. None of the predictor variables were demonstrated correlation coefficients indicative of multicollinearity. A more precise examination of the extent to which multicollinearity existed within each model was conducted through tolerance tests using the default value of .07 as the low level for tolerance.

To test each hypothesis, standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients (betas) were examined for statistical significance ($p < .05$). Multiple Rs and R^2 were examined for the overall predictive capacity of the regression models. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the primary predictor variables.

Insert Table 1 about here

RESULTS

Adolescent Social Competence and Parental Satisfaction

Substantial support was provided in both the fathers' and mothers' models for the prediction that adolescent conformity would demonstrate positive betas in relation to

parental satisfaction (see Table 2). In contrast, nonsignificant betas were demonstrated for the prediction that adolescent independence would positively predict parental satisfaction (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Partial confirmation was provided for the prediction that adolescent expert power would be positively related to parental satisfaction. Specifically, the relation between adolescent expert power and parental satisfaction demonstrated a positive beta that attained statistical significance for mothers but not for fathers (see Table 2).

Substantial support was provided in both the fathers' and mothers' models for the prediction that adolescent legitimate power would demonstrate positive betas in relation to parental satisfaction (see Table 2). In a similar pattern, substantial support was provided for the prediction that adolescent reward power would be positively related to parental satisfaction. Specifically, positive betas were demonstrated in both the mothers' and fathers'models (see Table 2).

No support was provided for the prediction that adolescent coercive power would be negatively related to parental satisfaction. Although the direction of relationships paralleled the prediction, nonsignificant

betas were demonstrated from both the mothers' and fathers' models (see Table 2) models.

Parental Qualities and Parental Satisfaction

Substantial support was provided for the prediction that parental support demonstrate positive betas in relation to parental satisfaction for both fathers and mothers (see Table 2). No support was found for the prediction that parental induction would positively predict parental satisfaction (see Table 2). Nonsignificant betas were evident for both mother and fathers. Partial support was provided for the prediction that parental coercion would be negatively related to parental satisfaction. A significant negative beta was demonstrated for fathers, while a nonsignificant negative beta was demonstrated for mothers (see Table 2).

Partial support was provided for the prediction that traditional sex role attitudes would be positively related to parental satisfaction. A significant positive beta was demonstrated for fathers, while a nonsignificant positive beta was demonstrated for mothers (see Table 2).

Sociodemographic and Other Control Variables

A positive relationship was evident for the gender-of-adolescent variable in the fathers' model. The significant negative beta indicated that fathers' reported greater satisfaction from sons than from daughters (see Table 2). A nonsignificant positive beta was demonstrated for the

gender-of-adolescent variable in the mothers' model. The interaction terms used to test for gender differences in the relations between the predictor and criterion variables were not signficant predictors and none were included in the final model shown in Table 2.

The number of children in families, parental marital status, fathers' occupational level (an indicator of SES), and mothers' employment status demonstrated nonsignificant betas in relation to parental satisfaction for both the mothers' and fathers' models (see Table 2).

The combined influence of dimensions of adolescent social competence (i.e., independence, conformity, expert power, legitimate power, reward power, and coercive power), parental qualities (i.e., support, induction, coercion, and sex role attitudes) and the control variables (i.e., gender of adolescent, number of children, parental marital status, father's occupational level, and mother's employment status) accounted for signicant portions of the variance in parental satisfaction with their adolescents (R^2s for fathers' model = .63 and mothers' model = .50).

DISCUSSION

The results of the study provided considerable support for the proposals that both perceived adolescent social competence and parental qualities would predict parental satisfaction. Parents who reported evidence of social competence in their adolescents (i.e., evidence of successes

in their parenting roles) were found to report high levels of parental satisfaction. Parents who reported themselves to be the most supportive of their adolescents were highly satisfied with parenting their adolescents. Particular styles of attempting to control the adolescents (i.e., the use of induction or coercion) explained variance in parental satisfaction for fathers, but not for mothers. Fathers who used coercion (i.e, force) with their adolescents were the least satisfied fathers. In a similar pattern, fathers who used induction (i.e., rational control attempts) reported greater satisfaction with their adolescents. Additional studies are necessary to further refine conceptual models of the predictors of parental satisfaction with their adolescents and to consider bidirectional predictors of parental satisfaction.

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Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Variables Used in Multiple Regression Equations

Variable	Mothers[a] $\bar{X}$	Mothers[a] SD	Fathers[b] $\bar{X}$	Fathers[b] SD
Adolescent Social Competence				
Independence	28.44	3.44	28.12	3.35
Conformity	24.77	3.38	25.04	3.30
Expert Power	12.09	1.99	11.74	2.04
Legitimate Power	12.91	1.66	12.57	1.58
Reward Power	12.92	1.80	12.57	1.84
Coercive Power	14.70	3.84	15.15	3.56
Parental Qualities				
Support	8.31	1.13	7.70	1.42
Induction	7.13	1.66	6.77	1.70
Coercion	8.23	2.07	8.26	2.08
Sex Role Attitudes	18.00	2.74	16.42	2.35
Parental Satisfaction	18.87	2.06	18.03	2.37

[a] $n=335$; [b] $n=303$

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations and Multiple Regression of Fathers' and Mothers' Parental Satisfaction as Predicted by Adolescent Social Competence and Parental Qualities

Predictor Variable	Fathers[a] r	b	SE	B	F	Mothers'[b] r	b	SE	B	F
Adolescent Social Competence										
Independence	.31****	-.01	.03	-.02	.14	.34****	.02	.03	.03	.39
Conformity	.40****	.11	.03	.15	11.72***	.36****	.08	.03	.12	6.98**
Expert power	.44****	.08	.06	.07	1.78	.50****	.18	.06	.17	9.66**
Legitimate power	.45****	.27	.07	.18	13.93****	.45****	.21	.08	.17	7.62**
Reward power	.44****	.25	.06	.20	18.87*****	.40****	.13	.06	.12	4.93*
Coercive power	-.12*	-.02	.03	-.03	.64	-.11*	-.03	.02	-.05	1.20
Parental Qualities										
Support	.62*****	.70	.08	.42	72.79*****	.52*****	.74	.08	.41	79.20*****
Induction	.43****	.14	.07	.10	4.68*	.21	-.05	.06	-.04	.67
Coercion	-.21***	-.10	.04	-.09	5.16*	-.18***	-.07	.04	-.07	2.66
Sex role attitudes	.19***	.12	.04	.12	9.20****	.09*	.01	.03	.02	.14
Control Variables										
Gender of adolescent	-.15**	-.54	.18	-.11	9.07***	-.06	.05	.17	.01	.09
Number of children	-.18***	-.07	.05	-.05	1.89	-.14**	-.07	.06	-.05	1.36
Parents' marital status	-.13**	-.28	.31	-.03	.85	-.11*	-.29	.24	-.05	1.52
Father's occupational status	.05	.00	.00	.03	.82	.06	.00	.00	.00	.00
Mothers' employment status	-.03	-.10	.17	-.02	.32	.00	.08	.18	.02	.22
Multiple Correlation (R)					.79					.70
Multiple Correlation Squared (R^2)					.63					.50
Adjusted R^2					.61					.47
F-Value					32.72*****					20.93*****

r=correlation coefficients; b=unstandardized betas; SE=standard error; B=standardized betas
[a]n=303, df=(15,287); [b]n=335, df=(15,319)
*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, p*** ≤ .001, ****p ≤ .0005, *****p ≤ .0001